

Council leader says firework disorder needs to be addressed by lawmakers

The leader of West Lothian Council has called for a “complete rethink” on sentencing of thugs who attacked police and fire crews in the wake of Bonfire Night violence.

Speaking at this month’s meeting of the Livingston South Local Area Committee, Councillor Lawrence Fitzpatrick said he found the hostilities around November 5 “depressing”.

Councillors thanked fire officers for their work in the run-up to the event with Maria MacAulay saying there had been a massive change in areas like Ladywell.

Watch Commander Paul Harvey gave a run-down of fire statistics for the second quarter of the year to the meeting. These do not include incidents around Bonfire Night, which will be collated for the next meeting.

While there were some incidents in and around the Livingston area the most serious disruption in West Lothian was in Blackridge where fire crews were attacked in one incident.

Despite the new Firework Control Zones in place in Edinburgh the capital saw the worst outbreaks of violence, with attacks on fire crews and police officers as well as criminal damage to properties including new cars on a car sales lot.

Councillor Fitzpatrick said he had heard complaints of a fire

being set up in open space on Dedridge Rise – with people throwing fuel on it. The neighbours, who are mostly elderly, were afraid to confront the culprits and the site, which is considered as greenspace and now has to be cleared up by the council.

Representing Livingston Village Community Council, Diane Loughlin raised concerns about the size of a bonfire in Alderstone Place. Mr Harvey told the meeting that organisers of the bonfire had been spoken to on the day and cautioned against adding more material because the bonfire, when inspected at lunchtime, was at permitted height.

He said he would consult stats to see if crews were called back and report to the committee.

Mrs Loughlin said: “Fireworks seem to be out of control for me. It just goes on and on and seems to be so noisy. I just don’t understand why we should be allowing it. It’s gone on for a week now and we know it will happen again again at Christmas and New Year. My neighbourhood is fed up with it.”

Councillor Fitzpatrick said: “I think we really have to think this through hard, the whole Guy Fawkes night. It’s up to lawmakers because what I found really depressing, bearing in mind what you [SFRS] and the police do, was what happened in Edinburgh.

“Fire officers were not able to get out of their machines because they were getting rocks and stones thrown at them and a woman police officer got struck with a brick through a police car window.

“What is the sentencing arrangement for those who commit crimes like that? Personally, I think there’s a complete rethink required on this issue.”

Councillor MacAulay thanked police council and fire crews for all the work they did in the run up to Bonfire Night. “I know

there's an awful lot of collaborative work and it does make a difference. I know the community council I was at last night – Ladywell- they said there wasn't as much of an issue this year and that's the first time they have felt it, so that's pretty massive. I know it takes a long time for these things to come into effect.”

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter