

West Lothian does not need Firework Control Zones, according to SFRS

West Lothian does not need Firework Control Zones, according to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

Partnerships developed following past anti-social behaviour have been effective enough in curbing lawless and dangerous behaviour across the county.

Reports of violence were limited to one area on Bonfire night last year and the number of incidents in and around November 5 dropped significantly.

Firework Control Zones were introduced last year by new legislation from the Scottish government.

Zones can be set up by local authorities following public requests and mean that setting off fireworks in that area is illegal.

Four zones were introduced in November last year in areas of Edinburgh, including Seafield next to the Cat and Dog home, and in Niddrie, the scene of violence the year before.

The zone rule did nothing to stop an outbreak of violence and anti-social behaviour in Niddrie last November, with widespread attacks on police who had to don riot gear to tackle thuggish behaviour as emergency crews were attacked and property damaged.

Having delivered a debriefing report on the last Bonfire night

in West Lothian, Paul Harvey, the local Scottish Fire and Rescue Service liaison officer, answered questions at this month's meeting of the Community Safety Board.

He pointed out to the work done by the SFRS with local schools in the run up to Bonfire night as well as collaborative work with council departments identifying rubbish build ups and potentially dangerous bonfires. The use of council's social media channels also reinforced stay safe messages around Bonfire night.

Councillor Craig Meek asked: " In terms of yourselves or any of the other partners will you be recommending any Firework Control Zones for West Lothian at this point?"

Watch Commander Paul Harvey said: "There's been extensive conversations around Firework Control Zones. We, at this point, would be recommending the alternatives to Firework Control Zones that West Lothian has provided over the last number of years.

"I think they have been successful in keeping down the number of firework related crimes, however we obviously are open to discussion on the zones"

Only one incident of violence against emergency services was recorded on Bonfire night when fire crews were targeted by stone throwing youths in Blackridge.

There had been reports of fire-work related anti-social behaviour in Blackburn in the lead up to Bonfire night but the evening itself was calm thanks to ongoing work by the community through the Blackburn Bonfire Night Action Group.

Blackburn in the past had been branded a war zone on Bonfire night until the community decided to take a stand against firework thugs in 2019 and worked with the police, fire service and council to establish the action group. Local youth were praised for their behaviour on Bonfire night.

Councillor Meek said: "I welcome this report. It demonstrates great partnership working throughout multi agencies and the proof is there that the partnership work and proactive work that everyone is doing is making a big difference."

By Stuart Sommerville Local Democracy Reporter