

Praise for staff who worked through storm to clear trees

The ‘significant’ damage caused by Storm Eowyn led to a huge surge in calls to West Lothian Council and has seen ‘thousands’ of trees lost, it has emerged.

Livingston North Local Area Committee heard that the council’s countryside service received 800 calls in four days from 24 January.

Simon Scott from the NETs Land and Countryside team said: “To put that in context we received 37 inquiries [for Livingston North] in the last three months of last year.”

Livingston councillors praised the council teams for their work making fallen trees safe across the town during the storm, which saw a red ‘danger to life’ weather warning issued for the area.

Teams were out during the storm and in the immediate aftermath clearing roads and paths of debris.

At a recent meeting, David Lees from the NETs team told councillors on the Livingston South Local Area Committee: “West Lothian did suffer a significant amount of damage to the tree stock across the county.

He added: “The council’s own arborists and contractors carried out work initially to clear trees that were blocking roads and footpaths or causing other dangers. They have cleared the dangerous stuff and will have to revisit quite a few sites.

"In the last week the team has been carrying out surveys of woodland sites."

Councillor Lawrence Fitzpatrick, chair of the Livingston South committee thanked staff for their work. "I know the team has been flat out and officers were out on the day of the storm and the weekend after it. We are aware that damage has been done to a number of properties and we are responding as quickly as possible."

Councillor Maria MacAulay said: "I just wanted to praise the work that's been done with all the trees that have come down. Being out in the storm was just exceptional. Thank you."

Speaking to the North Livingston Local Area Committee on Friday Mr Scott said: "We have lost thousands of trees. It was a unique event. The particular number has not been fully quantified yet. In context, we have hundreds of thousands of trees that the council is responsible for maintaining."

He assured the meeting that trees on private land would be attended to if they were overhanging public footpaths in Eliburn, and landowners such as the Woodland Trust had been contacted.

Councillor Alison Adamson said: "I know the efforts put by the arborists anybody connected with the clean-up operation after the storm damage. It was absolutely incredible. I know that there's still work to do, to go back and clear things, but I think everybody can see that there was a huge effort put in."

"Thank you to all the teams that were involved especially the fact that they were going out in some of the worst weather to actually deal with things. That's above and beyond"

Chair of the Livingston North Committee Labour's Anne McMillan told committee: "The work that has been put in has been tremendous. If it is possible, we could get an idea of what has still to be done. That in itself would be a programme of

works. It's probably created an added burden on the service."

Mr Scott said: "I would say that would be straightforward enough to compile a report. Where we are right now, we still have some issues to deal with dangerous trees. By and large they are secured and fenced off".

He added that ongoing work would be carried out to cut up and clear fallen trees across the new town before planning a next stage. He suggested it would be helpful to compile a report of the situation for all local area committees.

Councillor McMillan said: "That would be great, and I think would also help manage expectations."

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter