

West Lothian celebrates launch of Homecoming Scotland

West Lothian's leaders have issued a special invitation to visit the area during Homecoming Scotland 2009.

In the grounds of historic Linlithgow Palace, Council Leader Peter Johnston and Provost Tom Kerr launched the initiative to encourage people returning to Scotland to come and visit West Lothian.

Leader of West Lothian Council Peter Johnston, said: "Visitors to West Lothian can expect a warm welcome. We have a fantastic mix of history and heritage; attractions and activities; traditional towns and villages; and of course shopping to suit every taste.

"West Lothian is doing its part to celebrate by putting on a packed calendar of events which showcase some of West Lothian's great culture and history such as traditional events, dancing and music. Check out the council's website: www.westlothian.gov.uk and click on the Homecoming Scotland link."

Provost Tom Kerr added: "The 25th of January marked the 250th anniversary of the birth of Robert Burns and the official launch of Homecoming Scotland. We are backing Homecoming Scotland and we are committed to encouraging visitors to our area.

"Whether they are visiting for the first time, coming back to visit friends and family or getting to know our area better. West Lothian invites residents and visitors to come and celebrate the year of the Homecoming with us."

During the Homecoming year Scotland will be celebrating with a spectacular year-long calendar of events to highlight Scotland's great contributions to the world: golf, whisky, great minds, innovations and Scotland's rich ancestry and culture.

A Homecoming West Lothian events guide with details of local Homecoming events has been produced and will be in circulation soon, as well as published online at www.westlothian.gov.uk

Budget better for services and your savings

West Lothian Council has pledged to invest in local services while easing the financial burden on local taxpayers.

A total of £380 million will be ploughed into services in West Lothian, an increase of over £19 million on the previous year, after the council's 2009/10 budget was agreed.

Council tax levels will be frozen for a second successive year, boosting family budgets during the current financial climate, with the Band D figure remaining at £1,128.

Council Leader Peter Johnston said: "I'm delighted to deliver a budget that improves services to our communities without adding more financial pressures on local taxpayers.

"We are putting more money into important local services such as nursery, primary, secondary and

**special schools, care for children and the elderly, and
police and fire services.**

“This will be achieved through modernising services, including a £2.8 million programme of efficiency measures across the council, to provide better value for money for council tax payers at a time when family budgets are stretched.

"We will also be working closely with the Scottish Government and our community planning partners in West Lothian to improve services and deliver more for local people and communities.”

The Council Leader continued: “There will be more teachers employed to meet growing pupil numbers in West Lothian and to make further progress on reducing class sizes. A high priority will be given to improving the fabric of our schools through an ongoing programme of refurbishment and renovation of existing school buildings as well as the building of new schools.

“We will also continue to be a national leader in Curriculum for Excellence, ensuring high standards in all our schools, and free swimming will continue to be available to all school pupils during holiday periods and every Friday afternoon.

“This budget allows us to provide greater support for carers and roll out free school meals for families entitled to maximum children’s tax credit or maximum working families’ tax credit. We have also increased spending on services for older people, to properly provide for the growing numbers of older residents, and will improve our community care services for people with disabilities and children and families.

“Our partners in the voluntary and not for profit sector will also benefit from a 2.7% increase in funding, to ensure they have the resources they require to continue their valuable work.”

Euro vote counts on 4 June

West Lothian residents are being encouraged to make sure they are eligible to vote in the upcoming European Parliament elections.

Scotland goes to the polls on Thursday, 4 June, to elect our six MEPs, and locals are being urged to make sure they are ready for this important date.

The European Parliament has a huge impact on our daily lives, from the price of your fish supper, human rights’ legislation or providing funding for local projects, such as the LEADER programme featured on page ten of this edition of *Bulletin*.

To be able to vote, you need to be included on the Register of Voters. If you are unsure about whether you are registered you can check the register at Council Information Services (CIS) centres and libraries. Your registration must be received by 19 May 2009 to be able to vote in the European Parliament elections in June. This is also the final date you can apply for a postal vote or change your existing postal or proxy vote.

Advice on how to register can be found at www.aboutmyvote.co.uk.

If any of your details change, such as moving home, it's important to update your records so you don't miss out. For more information, contact the Electoral Registration Officer, Lothian Valuation Joint Board, 17A South Gyle Crescent, Edinburgh, EH12 9FL, call 0131 344 2500 or email enquiries@lothian-vjb.gov.uk

Bronze award for Linlithgow

Historic Linlithgow has scooped a major international award.

The West Lothian town received the sought-after bronze award at the finals of the LivCom Awards, or International Awards for Liveable Communities, in China.

Linlithgow was the only Scottish finalist at the ceremony, which recognises communities who go that extra mile to make their area a better place to live. Council Leader Peter Johnston said: "I am delighted that the excellent work being done in Linlithgow to promote environmental improvements and sustainable living has been recognised at this prestigious world-wide awards ceremony.

"Linlithgow has been recognised as being a world leader in delivering the very best in heritage management and in taking local action to combat global issues.

"This is a fantastic achievement in itself, but we have also learned a great deal from the Liveable Community family which I believe we can put into practice locally to

make Linlithgow and West Lothian a much better place to live, work and play in.”

Linlithgow was shortlisted in the award category for towns with a population of up to 20,000 and faced opposition from finalists from Ireland, Canada, Australia, China and Belgium.

Martyn Day, Executive Councillor for Development and Transport, added: “It’s a terrific achievement to win a bronze award and I’d like to congratulate everyone involved.

“The Livcom awards have been an ideal way to showcase Linlithgow’s many attractions on the world stage, which we hope will result in a welcome tourism boost for the town. I hope we can do better next time and claim a gold award for Linlithgow in the future.”
The LivCom Awards were launched in 1997 and are endorsed by the United Nations Environment Programme.

Poetic praise to award-winning pie

Paul Boyle of Boghall Butchers has scooped the coveted title of World Scotch Pie Champion for a second time.

And Councillor Willie Boyle of Bathgate has written a poem to mark his namesake's achievement at the annual competition, which attracted a record 77 entries. "We are not related, but I felt I would like to pay my own tribute to Paul and his award-winning pies," said Councillor Boyle. "They are really delicious and in fact I handed out some of Paul's pies at a recent council meeting to let my colleagues sample and enjoy them. "I occasionally write poems and I read my latest out to bring some light relief to the proceedings at our meeting. I think the other councillors enjoyed my poem because it certainly raised a few laughs.

"They really seemed to enjoy tasting Paul's famous pies and the council agreed to send him a message of congratulations on his great achievement. I'm quite sure that the people of Bathgate, West Lothian and even further afield will be keen to sample Paul's tasty pies if they haven't already done so."

The Boghall Pie

**Let's consider this object of lust
With its well-proportioned and firm crust.
No saggy bottom or pasty dressing
But a golden pallor, a visual blessing.
The well refined recipe on which it is based
Give a heart and soul that reeks of taste.**

**There is fragrance to titillate the discerning nostril.
And a texture no tongue could ever find hostile.
Is this a great dish? A world champion? AYE.
Ladies and Gentlemen, I give you
A Paul Boyle Pie.
Councillor Willie Boyle**

Teaming up to tackle community needs

A partnership approach aims to better serve the needs of communities across West Lothian.

West Lothian Council and Lothian and Borders Police have agreed to a closer and more structured working arrangement, aimed at improving local public services by better focusing on local community needs.

The new structured partnership will use a local tasking and co-ordination process to raise the standard of services, and other partners, such as Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue Service and the voluntary sector are supportive of the initiative.

Council Leader Peter Johnston said: “This is an exciting development which will deliver improved public services for West Lothian residents.

“By working together to tackle the issues affecting our communities, we will be better able to resolve these matters and achieve lasting success.

“This will ultimately enhance community safety, and make a positive impact on our communities.”

Chief Superintendent Ronnie Liddle, Divisional Commander for West Lothian, said: “This new multi-

agency approach will allow us to sit round the table and come up with joint working solutions to tackle community safety, anti-social behaviour and quality of life issues in West Lothian.

“It will allow us to identify key areas of concern for communities and target our resources accordingly. It is based on the principles of the National Intelligence Model (NIM), which is the existing national policing business model.

“Simply this means that we gather local intelligence and information and direct activity towards the identified areas of concern.

“Our ultimate aim is to achieve successful outcomes for local communities, whilst providing a greater degree of accountability where residents know what we are doing and why.”

The new working system is expected to start in April 2009, and members of the community and elected members will receive progress updates through the Local Area Committees and other council, police or partner surgeries.

The Xcite Livingston leisure centre has now re-opened following a major £4 million redevelopment programme.

The former Bubbles building was extensively damaged by fire in June 2007, and has now been substantially upgraded with a range of attractive new facilities. The revamped leisure centre now boasts an excellent range of facilities for a fun day out for all the family,

including new flumes, new soft play area, new health spa, upgraded leisure pool with new water features and fitness centre.

Council Leader Peter Johnston, who unveiled a plaque to commemorate the refurbishment project, said: “This is a very special occasion as it marks the re-opening of the leisure centre more than a year after it was forced to close down.

“It holds a special significance for me personally, as I also had the privilege of opening the original Bubbles pool in my role as chair of West Lothian District Council’s leisure and recreation committee.

“I am confident that the people of Livingston and wider West Lothian will welcome, appreciate and enjoy the range of leisure facilities now available in this attractive new-look building.”

The flagship development is owned by West Lothian Council and operated by West Lothian Leisure Ltd, who have contributed £800,000 to assist facility improvements.

West Lothian Leisure chair Bruce Dixon, said: “I must congratulate everyone involved with this ambitious project. The team all worked extremely hard and we now have one of the best and most exciting leisure centres in the UK.”

Dive in for free swimming

Local young people are being invited to take the plunge for free swimming.

Children in West Lothian can swim for free at West Lothian Leisure Xcite pools across the area every Friday afternoon, as well as during school holidays.

Council Leader Peter Johnston said: “We are fully committed to increasing levels of participation in sport and physical activity among young people in West Lothian, and swimming is an excellent form of exercise with significant health benefits.

“Free swimming every Friday and during the school holidays is an excellent opportunity to do so.”

Free swimming for anyone aged between 5 and 16 years old runs from 1pm to 4pm every Friday, and from 10am to 4pm at participating pools during school holiday periods.

National transport plan welcomed

West Lothian Council is giving a warm welcome to the Scottish Government’s commitment to the Avon Gorge project in the new 10-year national transport plan.

“This is the first time that the missing link between the M8 and M9 motorways has been considered to be of national importance,” said Council Leader Peter Johnston.

“The council has been pressing the Scottish Government during the consultation on its 10-year

programme and clearly our message has been received on the wider economic and transportation benefits that a new crossing will bring to Central Scotland.

“The council will now work with its partners to bring the project forward at the earliest date.”

Martyn Day, Executive councillor for development and transport, added: “We have been campaigning for many years for a new Avon Gorge crossing. This is a critically important road link with key safety issues.

“This is brilliant news for West Lothian. We are really pleased that the Scottish Government has responded positively to the joint case presented by West Lothian and Falkirk Councils.

“ We now look forward to detailed discussions on the timing and implementation of this very important project.”

Councillor Johnston also welcomed the transport plan’s commitment for a replacement road crossing over the Forth.

“We have still to see the detail of the plans being brought forward for the new crossing and the existing Forth Road Bridge,” said the Council Leader

“We hope that the provision for public transport will increase opportunities for bus operators in West Lothian. The new crossing has implications for the road network in West Lothian and we will be seeking further discussions on this national project.”

Action plan on flooding

West Lothian Council has welcomed the launch of the Scottish Flood Forum.

“This is an important national initiative which will provide a range of practical advice about flood prevention measures,” said Executive councillor for the environment Robert De Bold.

“The launch in West Lothian by Environment Minister Michael Russell will help raise public awareness of flooding issues, which we welcome.

“Here in West Lothian, the council is taking action on its own flood prevention measures at Broxburn.

“The council has already received approval to implement a local £5.6 million flood prevention scheme over the next four years.

“We also intend to promote a follow-up scheme in consultation with local residents.”

**No to Cold Calling in West Lothian
Communities across West Lothian are giving bogus callers the red card.**

Following a push from Lothian and Borders Police and West Lothian Council’s Trading Standards, 17 areas across West Lothian have now established Cold Calling Control Zones in a crackdown against unwanted callers and rogue traders.

Blackburn and Bathgate are in the process of joining the scheme, which involves community councils,

Neighbourhood Watches and local councillors working with the police and council to protect West Lothian residents from doorstep crime.

Over 1,100 Cold Calling Control schemes operate throughout the UK and figures indicate that overall crime in these areas can drop by as much as 80 per cent.

Signs attached to lamp posts identify the zones and indicate that doorstep selling is not welcomed in the area. Residents participating in the scheme are being issued with special red cards to hand out to unwanted callers telling them that they are not welcome, preventing embarrassment or confrontation on the doorstep.

Community members and neighbours are also being encouraged to watch for unusual street activity and if necessary report this to the police.

If you want further information on Cold Calling Control Zones, contact Livingston Police Station Safer Communities Department on 01506 445671.

Fighting back against the scammers

West Lothian Council's Trading Standards Service teamed up with The Office of Fair Trading (OFT) for the nationwide 'Scamnesty' campaign, to try to combat the scams that cost the UK an estimated £3.5 billion a year.

Members of the public were asked to follow the advice of the campaign slogan and 'Drop in and drop them in it', by collecting any potential scam mailings they have recently received and putting them into designated

'Scamnesty' boxes at local libraries and other public areas.

Executive Councillor for services for the community, Frank Anderson, said: "Every year an estimated three million people fall victim to mass marketed scams such as bogus lotteries, deceptive prize draws and sweepstakes, fake psychics, and miracle health cures. "Many of these scams are sent by post, as well as by email or over the phone, and cause particular harm to the elderly and vulnerable. However, the OFT research suggests that fewer than 5% of victims report the scam to the authorities.

"Through initiatives such as our Cold Calling Campaign and the new Scamnesty Campaign, we are committed to working with our partners and helping to ensure that our communities are not at risk from scams."

Mike Haley, OFT Director of Consumer Protection, added: "We want the public to help us beat the scammers by taking part in Scamnesty.

"The mailings collected will be vital in helping us gather intelligence on the latest scams and in stopping the worst offenders from continuing to bring misery to thousands of vulnerable people each year."

Scams Awareness Month is part of an annual international initiative organised by the International Consumer Protection and Enforcement Network.

If you think you have been the victim of a scam, or you suspect a scam, call Consumer Direct for clear, practical consumer advice on 08454 04 05 06 or visit www.consumerdirect.gov.uk

Keep kids active

A varied programme of activities aims to keep local kids occupied during the school summer holidays.

West Lothian Council's Cultural Services is launching their Summer Activity programme, with events to appeal to young people of all ages including outdoor activities, sport, art, music, drama workshops, play schemes, reading schemes and much, much more.

The programme will be available from Monday, 30 March 2009, with bookings taken from Monday, 6 April. Early booking is encouraged as some courses are popular and can get booked up quickly.

Pick up a copy of the programme in your Library, Community Centre, Sport Centre, Swimming Pool and CIS offices, or download it from our website at www.westlothian.gov.uk from 30 March. The summer programme for the Low Port Outdoor Education Centre website will also be online at www.lowportcentre.co.uk

Good advice to stay safe as houses

Help is at hand for West Lothian homeowners struggling to keep up with their mortgage repayments.

West Lothian Council's Advice Shop and the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) West Lothian are offering free advice to anyone facing difficulties making payments. A number of companies are offering 'sale to rent' schemes, giving homeowners the opportunity to sell their home and then rent it back, with the chance to buy

it again when their finances improve. However, such schemes can involve homeowners being offered below market price for their property then have to pay the full price to buy it back later, or only receiving a short-term assured tenancy.

Councillor Gordon Beurskens, who represents the council on the board of CAB West Lothian, said: “I would encourage anyone facing difficulty meeting their mortgage payments and considering a ‘sale for rent’ scheme to fully explore all their options before entering any agreement.

“Both CAB and the Advice Shop offer free, confidential and impartial advice on a range of issues, including housing and financial help, making them the ideal place to go for those in financial difficulty looking for assistance.

“CAB can also help in other areas such as welfare benefits, legal issues, employment and consumer concerns. Anyone can contact them at their office in Sheil House, Craigshill, Livingston, telephone 01506 432977, or email enquiries@cabwestlothian.org.uk”

Isabel Hutton, Executive Councillor for Social Policy, added: “In the current financial climate, a number of families may be considering ways to ease their financial burden.

“The Advice Shop and CAB staff can run homeowners through the range of alternative schemes to find the right choice for them.

“Making the wrong decision with sale to rent can end up costing families more in rent per month than they were paying for their mortgage, and can allow unscrupulous

firms to exploit legal loopholes to force new tenants from their own homes, so should not be entered into lightly.

“This is a very complex area, but our trained advisers at the Advice Shop can help homeowners find the best resolution.”

West Lothian Council’s Advice Shop is based in Waverley Industrial Estate, Bathgate, telephone 01506 776444 or email advice.shop@westlothian.gov.uk

welcome to Education and Cultural Services

Over the next four pages, we are going to tell you about Education and Cultural Services and our improvements over the last few years, and how we are working hard to continue to improve.

In West Lothian there are 11 secondary schools and 66 primary schools, along with five schools which provide education to children with additional needs.

These schools educate more than 26,000 young people between them.

There are also 14 nursery schools and Early Years Centres and 40 nursery classes which provide pre-school education to three and four year olds. To ensure that enough places are available for all three and four year olds, we have joined together with private and voluntary nurseries.

The council examines the quality of these places so that we can be confident that all young people get the best possible start in life.

Investment

The council has invested heavily in school buildings. Since 2000 three new primary schools have opened: Livingston Village , Linlithgow Bridge and more recently Simpson in Bathgate. Two new state-of-the-art secondary schools in Deans and Armadale are nearing completion.

We have extended and refurbished many schools to cope with the rising population, to allow smaller classes and to improve the quality of school buildings. Major projects are underway at Inveralmond Community High School, the James Young High School and St Kentigern's Academy. The current project at Longridge is an example of how we can create a community hub through locating community facilities at the school and extend the school for community use.

Our investment in Information and Communication Technology has placed West Lothian in the forefront of Scottish councils in the availability of computers and interactive 'smart boards' in the classroom.

Sports and outdoor activities

The council works with West Lothian Leisure to provide access for all to high-quality sports facilities. West Lothian has seen large-scale investment in fitness

suites and also swimming pools, including a brand new pool in Bathgate which is currently under construction. Our Sports and Outdoor Education Service works with clubs and coaches to improve the quality of sport in West Lothian for those who want to take their involvement further. Our Elite Sporting Programme for secondary school pupils allows talented young athletes to include their sporting activities within their timetable, so that they can maximise their achievement. Many opportunities for after school and school holiday activities are available, to promote health and enjoyment of physical activity. The Low Port Centre in Linlithgow offers top-class opportunities for outdoor education for school-age pupils and also the wider public.

Community Learning and Development

Education doesn't end when young people leave school. The 15 libraries in West Lothian provide access to: a wide range of books, including special collections of large-print books, and books in minority languages. Our libraries also offer free access to personal computers and the internet, with help on hand for beginners; DVDs; clubs; and activities.

Community Learning and Development works to improve adult literacy as we know that problems with reading and writing can make life very difficult. In particular it makes it hard for people to find employment. So, we are working hard to provide support to those who want to improve their literacy. Services are also provided to people for whom English is not their first language.

Through our 42 Community Centres spread across West Lothian, we provide an interesting and varied range of courses and educational opportunities for adults. Community Learning and Development also provide many services for young people including Young Scot and special programmes during the school holidays offering sporting and other activities. In particular, we promote the democratic process through the Youth Parliament and other activities for young people.

It is very difficult to cover the whole range of our activities within such a short space, however, we hope that we have given you a good insight into the services we provide, and how important they are to the communities of West Lothian.

We hope you enjoy the rest of this supplement. In it we will look in a bit more detail at how we are working to improve our services, and therefore the quality of life of all West Lothian residents.

Leisure, arts and culture

The Arts Service delivers opportunities to attend top-quality performances and exhibitions, and also to participate in the arts. Our services for young people include arts education projects aimed at school-age children, and instrumental music tuition. West Lothian has a proud record of musical excellence with our bands and ensembles picking up a string of awards and accolades. Our 'three venues strategy' will see high-quality exhibitions and performances available to the general public at the Regal Theatre, Bathgate, the soon-to-be-opened Howden Park Centre in Livingston, and

the Burgh Halls, Linlithgow. Major investment by the council will dramatically improve the ability of people of all ages in West Lothian to experience and participate in high-quality artistic events and performances. Discover the rich heritage of West Lothian at one of the many museums or the local history library.

SVQ success for children's workers

Fifty early years and childcare workers from out-of-school care, wraparound, private nurseries, playgroups, childminders and schools received certificates for SVQ3 in Children's Care, from executive councillor for education Andrew Miller. The group had recently gained qualifications to allow them to register with Scottish Social Services Council, which works to improve the quality of care and service provided to the public.

Raising attainment

The education that our young people receive at school is vital to them in later life. It can open up employment opportunities and encourage interests, leisure activities and hobbies. The education that we provide will give our young people the life skills that they will need to live in, and contribute to, a successful Scotland.

Since West Lothian Council was formed in 1996 we have made huge efforts to improve the quality of education we deliver, and to ensure that the young people of West Lothian leave school with qualifications that will maximise their chances of success in life.

These efforts have paid off. In 1996 West Lothian lagged towards the bottom of 'league tables'. Now, we consistently outperform similar council areas, and beat the national average across a range of important measures. Our young people are leaving school with better qualifications than in 1996 or even five years ago. The attainment of West Lothian pupils has risen significantly in Standard Grade examinations. Pupils' exam results are generally better than similar council areas and are above or equal to the national average in all categories. Pupils from West Lothian are amongst the best performing in Scotland in Standard Grade English and mathematics. Ninety-four percent of our pupils left school with Standard Grades in English and maths, an important standard of education that will allow them to move on to employment or training. They outperform those in similar areas and performance generally is around the national average. The attainment of our pupils in Higher Grade exams has also improved. They now outperform those in similar areas, and performance is generally around the national average.

A review of the examination system in Scotland is currently underway, with Standard Grades likely to be replaced by a new exam. We will keep you informed of progress with this change, and also new methods of measuring attainment in the primary and early secondary years.

West Lothian has seen significant improvements in attainment at both primary and secondary stages over the years. This upward trend, and the impressive rate of improvement, has been recognised by the Government's school inspectors. We are not

complacent, however, and continue to work hard to deliver new ways of raising attainment, some of which are covered elsewhere in this supplement.

Because education is so vital for the future of our young people and therefore our society, all of us – pupils, teachers, parents and the wider community must work together to raise attainment in our schools to ensure that our young people get the best possible start in life.

Stellar Awards roll of honour

More than 300 pupils from across West Lothian were recognised for their excellent attainment and achievement at the fourth Stellar Awards ceremony.

The awards celebrate educational excellence and feature categories for academic attainment, citizenship, equality and diversity, achievement, and teamwork.

Attainment: S3/S4 Abbie Hutchinson, Armadale Academy; S4 Laurelle Johnstone, St Margaret's Academy; S5 Ross Learmonth and from S6 Michael Argent, James Young High School. Achievement – Art: Winners: Jack Laing, Carmondean Primary School and Lesley Marr, Bathgate Academy. Commended: Nicole Dron, Bathgate Academy and Niall Stevenson, Linlithgow Academy. Achievement – Dance/Drama: Winners: Melissa Rodgers, West Calder High School. Commended: Michelle Clark and Natalie Russell, West Calder High School.

Achievement – Music: Winners: Ross Learmonth, James Young High School. Commended: Taylor Reid, Williamston Primary School. Achievement – Sport: Winners: Robert Laing, Carmondean Primary School

and Stuart Boyle, West Calder High School.
Commended: Scott Adams, Springfield Primary School; Nichola Sturrock and Alyssa McCarthy, West Calder High School. Citizenship: Winners: Janie Baxter, Lucy Bavidge and Liana Kontou, James Young High School; Robert Magee, Deans Community High School. Commended: Natalie Stevens, Broxburn Academy; Plan International Group, Toronto Primary School; Pupil Council, Pinewood. Equality and Diversity: Winners: Matthew Williams, Springfield Primary School; Amy Dolan, Inveralmond Community High School. Commended: Robert Dalgleish, James Young High School. Team of the Year – Eco/Environment: Winner: Dedridge Primary School Eco Committee; Eco Group, James Young High School. Commended: Park and Walk Committee, Balbardie Primary School; Eco Team, Polbeth Nursery School; Dodgy Ringtones, Toronto Primary School; Woodland Trust Participation Group, Inveralmond Community High School. Team of the Year – Enterprise: Winner: Peel Webbies, Peel Primary School; The Ace Team, Inveralmond Community High School. Commended: P1/2 Enterprisers, Holy Family Primary School; Tuck 4U, Deans Primary School. Team of the Year – Expressive Arts: Winner: The Lighthouse Makers, Inveralmond Community High School. Commended: Animation Team, Boghall Primary School. Team of the Year – Healthy Living: Winner: Eco Health Group, Toronto Primary School. Team of the Year – Pupil Peer Support: Winner: P6/7 Buddies, Boghall Primary School; S3 Social and Vocational Skills, Broxburn Academy. Commended: JRSO and Travel Team, Williamston Primary School; Academy Adventure Activity Group, Bathgate School Cluster. Team of the Year – Sport: Winners: Football Team, Boghall Primary School; Under 16 Football Team,

**Deans Community High School. Commended:
Badminton Team, Deans Community High School;
Gymnastics Team, James Young High School.**

Facelift for Almondbank Library

Almondbank Library in Craigshill re-opened after an extensive refurbishment and established itself as the hub of the community.

Executive councillor for culture, Jim Walker commented: “The re-opening of Almondbank Library has been welcomed wholeheartedly by the people of Craigshill and the surrounding areas. The library has returned to its role as a central hub within the community.”

Library manager, Thomas Connelly said: “As with all our libraries our services are not limited to ‘traditional’ library provision of books for adults and children. Computer and internet access is free to all library members, and a DVD rental service is available. New titles and a wide range of older films are provided. Activities for children and young people are held on an ongoing basis. A book club has also started up and meets on the last Thursday of the month to discuss books in an informal and friendly setting.”

Bathgate Academy opens first Confucius classrooms

Pupils at Bathgate Academy are amongst the first pupils in Scotland to benefit from a state-of-the-art link with China – called Confucius Classrooms.

Confucius Classrooms are local hubs which stimulate and support the innovative teaching and learning of Chinese language and culture. They have been set up with support from Hanban (the Chinese equivalent of the British Council) to promote understanding of Chinese language and culture, with the aim of giving every school in Scotland access to their valuable resources. Examples of activities include: teaching Chinese; training of teachers to teach Chinese in primary and secondary schools; and organising conferences on the teaching of Chinese language and culture. Bathgate Academy's Head Teacher Joe Boyd, commented: "This is a wonderful opportunity for pupils to learn more about the fascinating Chinese culture and the fastest growing economy in the world. We are delighted that we have been chosen to host one of the hubs."

Aiming high at Burnhouse

Four pupils from Burnhouse School, completed their first Muay Thai Boxing Grading. A number of the students took part in a Muay Thai Friday challenge. The group trained in the martial art and learned about the country and its culture through research, and making and selling Thai crafts. The proceeds of this event were sent to a Thai charity of the children's choice. The students have also been involved in T-shirt designing and cooking Thai style. After months of dedication and hard work four of the pupils decided to attend their first grading and all successfully passed. It is a great achievement for the young people and for the school.

Accolades for the Arts and Instrumental Music

It has been an award-winning couple of months for Arts Services' Instrumental Music Service which has picked up a record five "gongs" recently including: Representatives from the council's Psychological Services team were invited to the House of Lords in recognition for their work in developing Nurture Group interventions.

The National Music Council "Will Michael Diploma" in recognition of the council's outstanding commitment to jazz in education. West Lothian is one of only three Scottish Local Authorities being honoured this year. n Gold at the National Concert Band Festival (NCBF) the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama saw West Lothian Schools Big Band given the top prize by an independent panel of adjudicators.

Silver at the National Concert Band Festival (NCBF) West Lothian Schools' Wind Ensemble won a silver award in the Youth Wind Band category.

Scottish Brass Champions again! At the end of last year West Lothian Schools Brass Band won the prestigious Scottish Youth Brass Band Championships 2008 for the fourth consecutive year.

The Championship was held in Perth Concert Hall. Both Aberdeen City Youth Band and Carnoustie and District Youth Band were very close and all three bands were presented with a gold award.

Wee Voices, Wee Music Makers is one of the top seven education initiatives In Scotland. It is one of the many projects devised by Arts Education Service to enhance the curriculum in West Lothian Schools and was

shortlisted in the category Education Initiative of the Year at the inaugural Herald Society Awards.

More choices and more chances

A new council team, a partnership between the Community Planning and Regeneration Service and Education Services, is working to ensure that all local youngsters leaving school make a positive move into further education, training or employment.

The team has placed key workers in two pilot schools, Whitburn Academy and Deans Community High School, to provide additional support to identified pupils. The staff will work closely with the Transition to Work Coordinators, based in secondary schools, to support the pupils.

The team's project manager, Evelyn Simpson explains: "Our aim is to provide additional support for pupils during the move from school to employment, training or further education – creating a more flexible curriculum in or out of the school where required. This is part of Curriculum for Excellence which is being introduced in schools."

Schools achieving customer service excellence

Six secondary schools have achieved the Charter Mark Standard, the government's gold award for excellent customer services.

They are Armadale Academy, Bathgate Academy, The James Young High School, St Kentigern's Academy, West Calder High School and Whitburn Academy. In addition a number of our primary schools have also received recognition by achieving this standard including: Bellsquarry, Croftmalloch, Eastertoun, Linlithgow Bridge, Livingston Village, Lowport, Knightsridge, St Joseph's Whitburn and Stoneyburn. Director of education services, Gordon Ford commented: "We are delighted that four Early Years Centres have also achieved full compliance this year with a staggering 29 best practices between them. This is very rare and demonstrates their commitment to delivering excellent customer-focused services."

National recognition for Nurture Groups

Representatives from the council's Psychological Services team were invited to the House of Lords in recognition for their work in developing Nurture Group interventions.

Nurture Groups are used to support children who are finding the demands of the main classroom very difficult. Schools set up small groups where children learn to work better with other children, and where a range of necessary social skills can be improved.

Senior Psychologist Dr Lynne Binnie commented: “The visit was fantastic recognition for the work we are carrying out in West Lothian.”

£5.2 million sports facility for Linlithgow Academy

Physical education has been transformed at Linlithgow Academy since the opening of a new state-of-the-art facility, including: four badminton-sized games halls, a fitness suite, changing rooms and a classroom. Work was also completed on the renovation of the existing facilities to include a dance studio.

The school now also boasts a climbing wall, and high-tech Schelde equipment, which reduces storage, with goals fixed to walls and operated electronically as well as a variety of assault courses for further variety within the curriculum.

This complements the existing facilities to include clubs who use the all-weather pitch and dance studio.

Stewart Harris, Chief Executive, sportscotland said: “sportscotland is delighted to have supported the new sports facilities at Linlithgow Academy with an investment of £500,000 from our Building for Sport programme.”

Councillor Jim Walker, executive councillor for culture and leisure, said: “Everyone involved with the school and the local community can be very proud of these new facilities. They will I’m sure enhance the culture of sporting excellence within the school and provide a great boost to the local community.”

A Sports Management Committee has been set up to assist with the running of the new facility and involves users, the Parent Council and school representation in addition to West Lothian Council's Sport and Outdoor Education team.

Champions in schools

West Lothian has signed up to pilot a new role model programme which is designed to increase the number of young Scots participating in sport and physical activity.

Champions in Schools is a partnership between the council and the Winning Scotland Foundation. Nine elite athletes including Shirley Robertson, Chris Patterson, Mark Beaumont and Catriona Morrison, will visit eight schools to meet pupils and discuss the importance of health, nutrition, physical activity and the importance of adopting a winning attitude.

The schools are: Linlithgow Bridge, Holy Family, Winchburgh, St John Ogilvie primary schools, Whitburn and Armadale Academies, and Deans and Inveralmond Community High Schools.

Shirley Robertson said: “Champions in Schools is a fabulous and much needed programme that reinforces the importance of maintaining a healthy diet, nutrition, physical activity and a positive outlook in life and sport. Whatever Scottish school-kids’ aspirations are, everyone can benefit from an inspirational programme that encourages self-belief, resilience and team-work.”

Andrew Miller, Executive Councillor for Education said: “I’m delighted West Lothian has been chosen for the Champions in Schools pilot scheme. Our Excellence in Sport programme demonstrates our commitment to developing the next generation of athletes and promoting an active, healthy lifestyle, and is already offering high-quality coaching and support for promising pupils.

“Champions in Schools perfectly complements this initiative and we hope it will inspire even more young people to fulfil their potential.”

Gearing up for 2009 exams

The countdown to the exam season has started. Pupils should be preparing in school and at home. Exams are traditionally a stressful time for everyone involved, however much of the tension can be reduced through careful preparation.

A former Head Teacher himself, West Lothian’s Head of Education (Quality Assurance), Pat Sweeney is well placed to share some advice: “Preparation for examinations is vitally important. While many young people take the traditional route of studying alone or with friends, more than 1,600 S3, S4, S5 and S6 pupils participated in the 2008 Study Support Programme. “Many of these pupils gave up their Saturdays to attend Study Support Masterclasses as did 40 teachers from across West Lothian Schools. In total 16 Masterclasses were delivered in English, Mathematics, French, Spanish, History, Chemistry, Physics and Biology. “The Masterclass programme is different because it offers pupils the opportunity to study in different environments with different teachers and pupils from other schools. Its key aims are to consolidate learning, boost pupil self-confidence and ultimately raise attainment in Scottish Qualification Authority Examinations.”

“Research shows that our pupils enjoyed the Masterclass experience, consistently rating highly the aims of the day and the excellent course materials.

Without exception pupils valued this additional learning opportunity and not only are they willing to take part again but are also prepared to recommend it to others. It is no surprise that the numbers attending these events are continually increasing.”

**For more information on the Saturday study classes
email: susan.comrie@wled.org.uk**

News in brief

Mid Calder Primary School: The 'Mid Calder Mindstorms' were delighted and extremely proud to win the award for teamwork in the first Lego League Challenge at Edinburgh University in 2008 for supporting Back Packs for Africa.

Whitburn Academy: During annual Help Week, pupils, staff and parents raised more than £5,250. The Scottish Action for Mental Health (SAMH), Teenage Cancer Trust and Blythswood Buckets of Love Appeal will share the cash.

Carmondean Primary School: Join in a fun run on Sunday 24 May and help to raise funds for an all-weather surface for the school's trim track. For information and registration forms telephone: 01506 432492.

Greenrigg Primary School: The Eco Committee supported the Woodland Trust Scotland Christmas Card Recycling Scheme.

Broxburn Academy finished top of all West Lothian schools at the 2008 Enterprising Mathematics National Competition at Strathclyde University.

St. Ninian's Primary School, Dedridge, has achieved its Green Flag, granted to eco-friendly schools by Eco Schools Scotland.

St Margaret's Academy: Sixth year students have been busy painting murals in the Children's Exam Room and

Waiting Area of the Accident and Emergency Department at St John's Hospital.

Deans Community High School: Celtic rock band Skerryvore performed their new single 'Caledonia' at a 'Homecoming Assembly' at Deans Community High School. The band, who are currently touring with Runrig, includes two former students Fraser West and Alec Dalgligh.

Deans Primary School: P6 pupils are helping to run the weekly credit union collection at the school, learning how to collect money, update passbooks and count takings.

www.wlfie.westlothian.gov.uk: is a one-stop shop for international news, projects, funding and partnership working within Education and Cultural Services. The site is updated regularly and contributions from council staff, community groups and youth organisations are welcome.

Howden Park Centre nearing completion

The £6 million transformation of Howden Park Centre in Livingston is on schedule for completion very soon.

The first conference to be hosted at the brand new Howden Park Centre, which has arts studios, flexible creative spaces, bar and bistro, and a 300-seat theatre, will be Education Services' Curriculum for Excellence conference on 27 March.

The purpose of this one-day conference, which will be opened by the Cabinet Secretary for Education Fiona Hyslop, is to share best practice in education. As well as presentations from West Lothian schools, a number of other Scottish councils will also showcase their excellent work.

Addiewell Centre opens

Purpose built, the centre offers 20 morning places and 20 afternoon places for nursery-age children. It also provides a pre-school education service where staff from education, social policy and health can work together to support children and families through improving health, wellbeing and educational opportunities. Group work is offered for parents and young pre-nursery children.

Councillor Andrew Miller, Executive councillor for education, commented: “I am delighted to open this fantastic new facility for young people and their families in Addiewell.

“Addiewell Early Years Centre includes a large, safe outdoor area, a parents’ room, a social policy playroom and a nursery room.

“There is no doubt that play and learning in the early years provides the building blocks for confidence and helps to set children up for a happy transition to primary education.”

The centre is also home to both a child health clinic and play and learn sessions on Tuesdays mornings, with a play and learn together drop-in on Friday mornings. The breastfeeding group also meet on alternate Mondays.

Bathgate better by design

Ambitious new plans aim to transform a West Lothian town.

Proposals to redevelop Bathgate town centre will see Lindsay House replaced with an attractive modern building housing new community facilities and council offices.

A new document, Bathgate Public Realm Design Guide and Design Framework, outlining a vision for Bathgate's public spaces has also been unveiled, promoting good-quality urban design and priorities for public area improvements.

Jim Walker, Executive Councillor for Culture and Leisure, said: "This is good news for Bathgate, and both projects will carry on the good work that has already taken place to revitalise the look of the town.

"A new library and improved community facilities at the centre of the town will be of genuine benefit to local residents, while the guide and framework will support real improvements to Bathgate over the next decade."

As well as a new library, the replacement building will also include a café, community hall, smaller hall, flexible meeting rooms, interview rooms, playgroup and out-of-school facilities, and landscaped garden. It will also contain a Council Information Services (CIS) centre, the Advice Shop and offices for council staff.

Work should be completed by spring 2011, and information boards giving details about the project have been erected in Bathgate and Boghall.

The Bathgate Public Realm Design Guide and Design Framework document was prepared by Ironside Farrar in conjunction with Enterprising Bathgate, and has been endorsed by West Lothian Council's Executive. It identifies a number of priority areas which should be the focus of improvement through investment by the council, Enterprising Bathgate and other public agencies, and sets out key design principles for improving the town including: retaining and enhancing existing character; providing and enhancing welcoming town centre gateways; and promoting more co-ordinated streetscape appearance.

Change to local registration service

A revised system has been introduced for registering births, deaths and marriages in some areas of West Lothian.

A new appointment-based registration service has come into operation at Council Information Services centres at Broxburn, Linlithgow, West Calder and Whitburn.

To make an appointment at all four CIS centres phone 01506 773473 or send an e-mail to registration@westlothian.gov.uk.

“ We guarantee to give an appointment within two working days, but aim to provide an appointment within one working day,” said a West Lothian Council spokesman.

“ The service is being provided at the appointed time by a dedicated registrar. ”

No appointments are necessary for the two main registration offices at Bathgate and Livingston, which are open from 9am- 4.30pm.

The registration service also remains unchanged at East Calder library, which is open daily from 10am-noon and 2-5pm.

Council backs tougher legislation on flyposting

The removal of unauthorised signage and flyposting is currently costing council taxpayers £60,000 a year.

Now West Lothian Council is supporting calls by East Dunbartonshire Council for new legislation, which would crack down on the problem by making the people and companies responsible pay for removal costs. Backing the calls for tougher legislation, Council Leader Peter Johnston said: “The policy in West Lothian since 2006 has been the removal of any unauthorised signs which are erected on council land and on road verges. “Typically, it is placard signs that relate to house sales which cause the biggest problem. This illegal practice of placing placard signs indiscriminately is known as flyboarding. This should be a wake-up call to the perpetrators. They are costing the people of West Lothian money and we will back moves to enable us to reclaim it.”

Provision exists in West Lothian for the recovery of costs associated with pursuing direct action to secure compliance with an advertisement enforcement notice. However, these provisions do not extend to cover flyposting and flyboarding.

East Dunbartonshire is calling for this to be addressed in a way which would make it easier for councils to recover such costs.

Local firm showcase Royal approval

Livingston-based Click Netherfield has been awarded the Queen's Awards for Enterprise, the UK's most prestigious prize for business performance.

The firm was honoured in the International Trade category of the awards, which recognise and reward outstanding achievement by UK companies.

Click Netherfield specialise in the design, manufacture and installation of the highest quality display cases for national and international museums and galleries throughout the world. Recent work includes the Louvre Museum in Paris, the Tate Gallery in London, the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh and the Hong Kong Museum of Art.

West Lothian's Lord-Lieutenant Isobel Brydie, Provost Tom Kerr and council chief executive Alex Linkston were invited to Click Netherfield's Houston Industrial Estate factory recently to see the company's success first hand.

Provost Tom Kerr said: "Congratulations to everyone at Click Netherfield for their achievement winning this prestigious accolade. "The Queen's Award for Enterprise is one of the top awards in the country, and the hard work by their local workforce played a major role in landing the trophy. "Winning this award is a real coup for both Click Netherfield and West Lothian."

Click Netherfield managing director Jim Stewart, added: "We are delighted to be honoured with this prestigious business award and extremely proud of the efforts of all

of our employees, whose hard work and dedication contributed to the winning of the award.”

Business update useful

A survey of West Lothian Council’s electronic business update has established that 80% of readers find it useful or very useful.

More than half (58.5%) said they had used the e-zine information in West Lothian Business Connections Online to help their business. The e-zine, produced by the council’s community planning and regeneration service, gives short news summaries that are a quick, easy read for busy business men and women.

It is emailed to more than 5,000 contacts, and a short two-page, hard-copy summary is also circulated by mail for interested parties who don’t have email .

Business services manager Sue Bedford-Visser said: “Businesses have told us that of most interest to them is news about other local businesses and new developments in the area. We are always pleased to hear from local firms and to publish their good news on the website and in the e-zine.

“We were pleased to learn that some 50% of readers forward the e-zine to others.”

If you would like to receive the e-zine, email your name, company name, address and postcode to enterprisecentre@westlothian.gov.uk or phone Andrew Cotton on 01506 777911.

Leading the way in rural funding

A new European funding programme will inject up to £1 million into rural projects in West Lothian.

Michael Russell, MSP, Minister for the Environment, launched the West Lothian LEADER Programme at Oatridge College, Scotland's specialist landbased college.

The LEADER Programme targets support primarily for small-scale, community-driven rural projects that are focusing on new, innovative ideas or pilot projects that are trying to approach current issues in a different way. The EU funds will be complemented by local funding and will be used to promote economic and community development within rural West Lothian. It is administered through a Local Action Group, comprising representatives from community, voluntary, youth and women's groups, together with representatives from the main public sector bodies.

Local Action Group chair, Councillor Martyn Day, said: "West Lothian stands to benefit over the next two to three years from this project, which will inject up to £1 million into rural projects.

"Local groups and organisations need to identify what is important to them so that appropriate, sustainable projects can be developed for their community."

The first two local projects are already benefiting from LEADER funding. The Community Chest is an umbrella project for the voluntary organisations, designed to allow small-scale projects to apply for funds of under

£10,000 without going through the time-consuming work that would be required for a normal stand-alone project. West Lothian Women's Aid (WLWA) have helped local women for over 28 years and currently have a base in Livingston. Additional LEADER funding to their Reach Out project will allow an outreach worker to spend time in more rural communities and remove one of the barriers that women face when seeking support. Minister for the Environment, Michael Russell, added: "LEADER is a vitally important source of funding for rural communities in Scotland and I am pleased to see West Lothian coming forward with such a forward-thinking plan to sustainably develop the local economy."

If you'd like more information on the LEADER funds, go to the website at www.leaderwl.co.uk or contact Avril Wallace, LEADER Coordinator, phone 01506 777916 or email avril.wallace@westlothian.gov.uk

Just the job

A new agreement will help people get a job with West Lothian Council.

Jobcentre Plus will identify job vacancies suitable for local long-term unemployed people, then work to help them develop the necessary skills for the vacancies and make an application to the council. Alex Linkston, West Lothian Council's Chief Executive, said: "This new agreement will build upon existing successful partnerships with Jobcentre Plus. We want to enable people to develop the skills and qualities necessary to get and stay in a job, and as an employer we have much to offer candidates, so the new partnership agreement is

a win-win situation all round. “We have the opportunity to get the best person for the job, and with the current economic climate creating uncertainty around job security, it’s important that West Lothian Council support local employment.”

Bill Wilson, District Manager Jobcentre Plus, said: “This is a fantastic opportunity for local people to access vacancies and build careers with West Lothian Council. “Jobcentre Plus wants to make it as easy as possible for jobseekers to access job vacancies, and local employment partnerships with employers give us the opportunity to do this.”

Landmark for local visitor attraction

Staff at Almond Valley Heritage Centre in Livingston were celebrating after welcoming a record number of visitors in 2008, with over 100,000 passing through their gates last year.

As well as being a museum to West Lothian's shale-mining past, Almond Valley also is home to a railway, farm animals and picnic area. Recent additions include an indoor soft play area, and an archaeological dig site and wartime garden.

Almond Valley director Robin Chesters said: "It's wonderful to have achieved this landmark, as we really weren't expecting it. Our visitor numbers have been growing steadily each year, and we've also had a larger number of locals taking out membership.

"The new facilities across the River Almond at Charlesfield and our new indoor soft play area have also proven very popular."

Councillor John Cochrane, who represents West Lothian Council on the Almond Valley Heritage Trust board, said: "I'd like to offer my congratulations to everyone at Almond Valley, which is a superb facility offering a range of attractions to suit the whole family. "As well as providing a great time for kids, it also plays a valuable role in keeping West Lothian's fascinating history alive. Almond Valley offers the perfect environment to promote both physical and mental health, and I'm pleased that West Lothian Council support it.

“I’d encourage anyone to visit Almond Valley and explore its varied attractions for themselves.”
Executive Councillor for Culture and Leisure, Jim Walker, who also represents the council on the trust board, submitted a motion congratulating the attraction at a recent meeting of the full West Lothian Council. “Well done to Almond Valley in achieving a landmark annual visitor total of 100,000,” added Councillor Walker.

“Almond Valley carry out excellent work in preserving our heritage and presenting it to our people in innovative, entertaining and educational ways. We will continue to support this much valued partner.”

SURF’s up for centre

Livingston-based community project has gained a national accolade.

The Daisy Drop In Centre at Craigshill received a highly commended certificate at the annual Scottish Urban Regeneration Forum (SURF) Awards.

“I am delighted that the excellent service provided for parents and carers of pre-school children at the Daisy Drop In Centre has now received national recognition,” said Isabel Hutton, Executive councillor for social policy on West Lothian Council.

“This is a great achievement as it is the first time that a West Lothian project has been a short-listed finalist at the SURF Awards.”

Pictured are Council Leader Peter Johnston and Nicola Sturgeon MSP with parents, volunteers and frontline workers from the Daisy Drop In.

Tall adventure for West Lothian young people

Two young people from the West Lothian Youth Inclusion Project had the adventure of a lifetime taking part in the Tall Ships Challenge.

Chris Barr from Livingston and Stuart Robertson from Blackburn enjoyed a week-long voyage around Tenerife and Azores on the *Atlantic Challenger* recently.

After graduating from a leadership course on the Isle of Skye, and securing funding from the Tall Ships Fund, the pair learned how to set the sails, handle the ropes, take the helm, keep a proper lookout and be involved in other varied tasks that keep a Tall Ship sailing.

Chris Barr said: “When we arrived to meet with our team, we felt a little out of our depth as we were the only Scottish people there, but the staff put us at ease and made us feel really comfortable, and within a couple of days we both understood what we needed to do to be crew members.

“I really enjoyed seeing the dolphins before we docked in Tenerife and having the opportunity to drive the boat; since returning I definitely feel I have more self confidence.”

Stuart Robertson said: “I had an absolutely fantastic time and enjoyed meeting lots of new people and making friends, I would recommend it to anyone.

“In fact, I enjoyed the challenge so much that in the future I’d like to return to volunteer as a ‘watch leader’.”

The Youth Inclusion Project (YIP) is part of the West Lothian Health and Care Partnership (CHCP) and aims to prepare young people between 16 and 25 leaving care and/or experiencing homelessness for work.

It provides a full comprehensive and holistic programme of personal and social skills, work skills, and community and recreational skills by working in partnership with existing local services and council departments.

Ellen Glass, Executive Councillor for Health and Care, said: “It’s great to see young people like Chris and Stuart enjoying themselves and gaining so much from an adventure like this.

“The skills they have developed during their trip will stand them in good stead for the rest of their lives.”

Keep recycling through the credit crunch

Local residents are being encouraged to keep recycling despite the current economic downturn.

Despite some media reports, West Lothian Council would like to reassure residents that any waste placed in their blue bins is still being recycled.

The markets are still healthy for the majority of recycled materials, and recycling is better for the environment and saves on landfill costs and landfill tax.

Executive Councillor for the Environment, Robert De Bold, said: “Although the current situation raises some uncertainty for local authorities like West Lothian Council, we have worked hard to provide a long-term plan to provide sustainable waste management options for the area.

“We have agreements in place so material sent for recycling will continue to be recycled in the future, so we can all do our bit to meet Scottish Government recycling and European landfill diversion targets.

“We are committed to recycling as part of a way of life in West Lothian, allowing our residents to choose good environmental practice as part of daily living.

“However, due to the falling value of the lowest quality materials that are sent for recycling, we would encourage everyone to make sure they are putting the right items in their blue and brown bins, and place as little as possible in the grey bin for landfill.”

Details of what goes in the bins can be found on your collection calendar, on our website at www.westlothian.gov.uk or by calling 01506 777810.

End of parking charges at St John’s

West Lothian Council has welcomed the abolition of car parking charges at St John’s Hospital.

“This is a very sensible move, which we warmly welcome,” said Council Leader Peter Johnston. “We have always viewed hospital car parking charges as a tax on the sick and their relatives. This decision also benefits staff who work at our local hospital.

“I am sure that the abolition of hospital car parking charges will be greatly appreciated by the people of West Lothian.”

The abolition of car parking charges applies to 14 hospitals across Scotland.

West Lothian residents have been praised for helping hit green targets

Approximately 500 tonnes of waste were recycled in West Lothian over the festive period, while local communities have also played their part in Waste Aware Scotland's Compost at Home campaign selling their 200,000th compost bin.

The festive period was very busy for the council's waste services, and saw them collect all 72,000 bins in three days rather than the usual five at both Christmas and New Year. Nine extra vehicles, 22 additional staff and 11 extra crews were drafted in to ensure there was minimal disruption to householders, with staff at the Community Recycling Centres also kept exceptionally busy by recyclers.

An impressive total of 7,374 bins have been distributed to West Lothian residents since Waste Aware Scotland's Compost at Home campaign began. Scottish compost bins have diverted an estimated 84,000 tonnes of kitchen and garden waste from landfill, saving 32,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide going into the atmosphere, the equivalent of taking almost 11,000 cars off the road for a year.

Executive Councillor for the Environment, Robert De Bold, said: "I'd like to thank West Lothian residents for once again proving their commitment to recycling. "The high volumes of recycling collected over the festive period and number of compost bins sold shows local residents are making a real effort to reduce, reuse and recycle, preventing waste going to landfill.

"Thanks also to all the waste services staff for their hard work over Christmas and New Year, collecting an

increased amount of recycling within the short timescales given.”

Celebrating diversity in West Lothian

A multi-cultural celebration brought the second West Lothian Diversity Week to a colourful conclusion.

A vibrant Mela-like celebration took place in St Margaret’s Academy, Livingston on 30 November, bringing together music, dance, food and fashion from the range of cultures found in West Lothian.

Attendance more than doubled this year, with over 1,100 people participating in one or more of the 15 different events, which also included the popular Witness exhibition highlighting slavery and a fascinating presentation from the new Equality and Human Rights Commission for Scotland on their vision and objectives. Council Leader Peter Johnston said: “This year’s diversity week was a huge success, and proved to be even bigger and better than the first last year, with a wide range of events for the whole community.

“It really helped promote and raise awareness of equality and diversity issues in West Lothian, while celebrating the different cultures found in our area. “I particularly enjoyed the multi-cultural celebration, which was a fun event for everyone, and attracted a large number of West Lothian families from minority backgrounds.

“West Lothian Council is committed to promoting diversity and equality, and I look forward to another successful Diversity Week next year.”

Supporters of Diversity week include Livingston Designer Outlet, the West Lothian Community Planning Partnership, Lothian and Borders Police and West Lothian Council.

**Funding boost for Special Olympians
Athletes in the Lothians have their sights set on Olympic gold after receiving a major financial boost from West Lothian Council.**

West Lothian is the first council to contribute to the Lothian Special Olympics team, providing £1,500 to help them compete in the Special Olympics in Leicester next year.

The funding has come from the West Lothian Trust for the Benefit of People with a Disability and will go towards developing a variety of sports at local level. Jim Walker, Executive councillor for culture and leisure said: “Our athletes have been successful in competing at previous Olympic events, and West Lothian Council is proud to support the West Lothian Special Olympics team and all athletes in the Lothians.

“We are keen to assist people with a learning disability achieve their goals and dreams and I hope our contribution will help many participants take part in this world-class event.”

Yvonne Anderson, Chairperson of the Lothian Special Olympics, added: “In this time of cutting back expenditure and the credit crunch, this is a very generous amount and West Lothian is the first authority to come forward and give a donation.

“I know everyone involved with the Lothian Special Olympics team will join me in thanking West Lothian Council for their generous support.”

In 2007 nine West Lothian members joined the 250 strong Great Britain team and returned home with a superb haul of ten individual gold medals, along with eight silver and one bronze.

Texting is the Biz

Businesses and residents in West Lothian can now access a range of services by simply sending a text message. The system works by texting a key word to a short number - in this case 60777.

Anyone thinking about setting up business in the area, or looking for advice, can text Biz to 60777 and an adviser will call them back.

Job seekers can also contact the Access2employment team for help and advice by texting Jobs to 60777. Martyn Day, Executive councillor for development and transport, explained: "West Lothian Council is committed to making its services easy to access. Almost everyone has a mobile phone - so it couldn't be easier to contact us.

"Anyone looking for employment should text Jobs and their name with the type of work they are looking for to 60777. While people starting up a business, looking for support or growing their business should text Biz with their name and area of interest to 60777. We hope that

people will find this a useful, easy and convenient way to contact us. "

Driving forward taxi improvements

A scheme to drive up taxi standards in West Lothian is stepping up a gear.

West Lothian Council's Executive has agreed in principle to end the long-standing limit on the number of taxis operating in the area, as part of a review of the local taxi industry over the next 12 months.

The review aims to look at ways to improve quality in the industry in key areas, such as vehicle suitability, fare structure and taxi ranks.

Executive Councillor for the Environment Robert De Bold said: "We have given detailed consideration to this important matter.

"We believe this is a fair and sensible move. It will provide a level playing field for the taxi trade and it will offer better choice to the people of West Lothian.

"We will now carry out a series of reviews before implementing the decision to de-restrict the number of taxi licences issued in West Lothian.

"This will allow greater control of the taxi trade, better enforcement measures and improved quality standards for drivers."

A series of reviews will be carried out over the next 12 months before the decision to de-restrict taxi numbers is implemented, looking at areas including: the types of vehicles suitable for taxis and private-hire cars with particular regard to safety, emissions and full

accessibility for disabled people; conditions and fare structure; taxi ranks; enforcement measures; and phasing arrangements for issuing additional taxi licences.

A total of 166 licences have been issued in West Lothian due to the policy of restricting taxi numbers and there are 134 applicants on the waiting list. The number of private-hire cars licensed in West Lothian has increased over the last 10 years from 60 to 303 with 13 applications pending.

**Freedom of information (Scotland) Act 2002
West Lothian Council publishes a range of information online and on paper. The council has developed a Publication Scheme to show the information we make available to the public and the available formats. Copies of the Publication Scheme are available at libraries and Council Information Services (CIS) centres.
It is also available online: www.westlothian.gov.uk**