



WHITBURN AND BLACKBURN LOCAL AREA COMMITTEE

HOUSING, CUSTOMER AND BUILDING SERVICES UPDATE

REPORT BY HEAD OF HOUSING, CUSTOMER AND BUILDING SERVICES

A. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide the Local Area Committee with an overview of the service activities within Whitburn and Blackburn ward.

B. RECOMMENDATION

The Local Area Committee is asked to note Housing, Customer and Building Service activity as detailed in the ward report for the period 1 July – 30 September 2018.

C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

I	Council Values	Focusing on our customers' needs. Being honest, open and accountable. Providing equality of opportunities. Making best use of our resources. Working in partnership.
II	Policy and Legal (including Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment)	Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 Housing (Scotland) Act 2010
III	Implications for Scheme of Delegations to Officers	None
IV	Impact on performance and performance Indicators	There is no impact
V	Relevance to Single Outcome Agreement	There are positive impact on the following SOA indicators: SOA4 – we live in resilient, cohesive and safe communities SOA8 – we make the most effective use of resources by minimising our impact on the built and natural environment
VI	Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property)	None
VII	Consideration at PDSP	Yes
VIII	Other consultations	N/A

D. TERMS OF REPORT

Housing Performance Information

The purpose of this report is to provide the Local Area Committee with an overview of the activities of Housing, Customer and Building Services, specific to the Whitburn and Blackburn Ward.

Property Void & Let Performance: Mainstream Tenancies

Void Period	July 2018	%	August 2018	%	Sept. 2018	%	WL Target %
0-2 wks	14	67%	21	55%	10	50%	55%
2-4 wks	0	0%	1	3%	1	5%	30%
4+ wks	7	13%	16	42%	9	45%	15%
Total Lets	21	100%	38	100%	20	100%	

Property Void & Let Performance: Temporary Tenancies

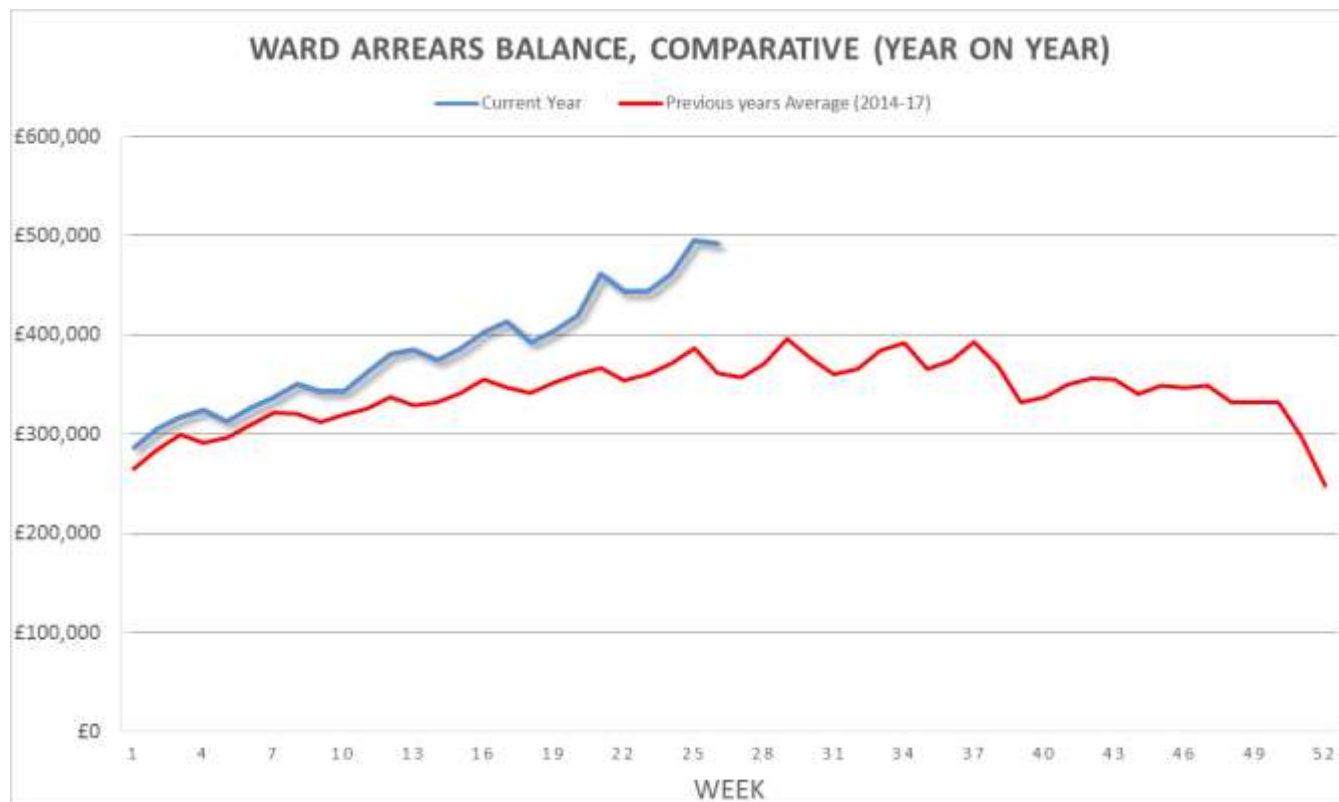
Void Period	July 2018	%	August 2018	%	Sept. 2018	%	WL Target %
0-2 wks	2	18%	1	20%	3	75%	80%
2-4 wks	6	55%	1	20%	1	25%	15%
4+ wks	3	27%	3	60%	0	0%	5%
Total Lets	11	100%	5	100%	4	100%	

Delays in re-letting can occur for a variety of reasons. The type or location of the property, the completion of void work or the identification of additional works not visible during the initial inspection. Ensuring that vulnerable persons are appropriately supported through the viewing and sign up process can also add to timeframes. Some of our applicants have specific support requirements which require detailed planning and co-ordination by both social work and housing services prior to tenancy commencement.

In the year to date there have been 131 mainstream tenancies and 36 temporary tenancies let by the Whitburn and Blackburn Team. There are 43 Policy Voids in the ward, reasons for being vacant include properties unable to let due Health & Safety reasons, 5 properties are being held for decant purposes due to remedial works, all of the decant properties are occupied.

Rent Arrears

For this ward the cumulative rental charge this year (debit) for the housing stock is £5,354,348 and £5,078,668 has been collected giving a strong collection rate of 94.9%



Arrears Banding	2017/18 (WK26)		2018/19 (WK26)	
	Balance	Tenants In Arrears	Balance	Tenants In Arrears
£0.01 to £99.99	£15,088	331	£18,965	548
£100.00 to £299.99	£61,390	333	£67,632	355
£300.00 to £499.99	£64,322	165	£86,807	224
£500.00 to £749.99	£58,919	98	£71,813	116
£750.00 to £999.99	£39,993	47	£66,244	77
£1000.00 to £1999.99	£67,103	50	£125,528	93
£2000+	£38,907	15	£54,722	19
Total	£345,723	1039	£491,711	1432

The Ward arrears position for Q2 is £491,711. This is an increase of £145,989 on last year's position. The West Lothian overall position has increased by £593,408 from last year and on 01 October was £2,405,181

While there are 112 serious arrears cases (£1,000+) it should be noted 63% of cases are in the lower bands (£300 or less)

The overall increased arrears in comparison to last year are as a result of Full Service Universal Credit being introduced in West Lothian from May 2018, along with other Welfare Benefit reforms and the current economic climate.

During the course of this year we plan to focus on the following:

- Making best use of resources by considering communicating more with customers through email and telephone
- Increase Direct Debit Take Up by targeted work for example tenants who currently pay by Standing Order
- Benchmarking with other local authorities to ensure we identify and consider implementing any best practice
- Performance Monitoring and Reporting will be reviewed and where appropriate streamlined to ensure information is meaningful and robust to assist with improving rent arrears due.
- Promote Alternative payment methods, particularly the Tenant's Self Service Portal
- Undertake a root and branch review of our arrears process to ensure we maximise rental income.

Whitburn and Blackburn Area Team Activity

Officers in the team have a number of tenancies under supervision for issues such as child & adult protection, anti-social behaviour and poor tenancy conditions. Our officers' work with a range of services and agencies to ensure tenants and residents are fully supported, tenancies maintained and sustained as far as possible and appropriate action taken where necessary.

Rent arrears activity continues to be a weekly priority task for the team and will continue to work with all our tenants in offering the support, advice and assistance. Such assistance includes referrals for money and debt advice, benefit health checks, completion of income and expenditure to help set up a sustainable payment plan and where appropriate, assist with applications for Discretionary Housing Payments and assist with Universal enquiries.

The Housing Team overall have settled well into the temporary office space in Blackburn and there continues to be a presence of housing staff within the library at Whitburn enabling Housing and CIS staff to continue to deliver customer service in Whitburn. Staff continue to visit the communal bin areas and take action where there is evidence of rubbish being dumped, pro-active action is taken where rubbish is identified, and arrangements are made for this to be uplifted in order for waste services to be able to carry out the programmed service to empty the bins.

Capital Programme and New Build Council Housing

Local New Build Update

Site	No. Of Units	Site Start	No. of Houses Handed Over	Site Complete
Redhouse	100	July 2016	100	October 2018

Capital Programme – Local Capital Upgrades

Blackburn	Ladeside	Upgrade BISF Properties to EESSH standard	85%	Progressing well, No issues.
Whitburn	The Loch Scheme	Structural roof works: Stairs and balcony repairs: Insulation: render upgrades:paths: lintel & cills where required	10%	Individual properties completed that required urgent major repairs. Programme is still at development stage and requires a Legal Agreement to approve the strategy

Whitburn	Empire Street, Baillie Street and Bog Road	Roofs & Roughcast to all: Heating upgrades and chimney removals:steps and paths	80%	On site and progressing well, no issues
Whitburn	Glebe Road, Union Road, Armadale Road, Manse Avenue, Griffith Drive, Dick Gardens	Roofs & Roughcast to all: Heating upgrades and chimney removals:steps and paths	71%	Year 5 of the programme which is progressing well.

Tenant Participation Update

Tenant Led Inspection – The latest Tenant Led Inspection into areas of Homelessness commenced in August with two experienced tenant inspectors and one new to the process, the team meet weekly to look at how relevant policy and procedures work as well as carrying out interviews with staff and customers. The final report will be presented to Senior Management in December with a full action plan developed soon afterwards.

‘Al Nour’ (meaning Light) the new community group for Syrian Refugees have welcomed new families to West Lothian. The Group was established to allow families an opportunity to meet in a safe and secure environment to become more confident in communicating in English allowing them to integrate into their communities and become more independent. The group have received Office Bearer training and have now elected office bearers and drawn up a work plan

TIS Event the TP Team and a member of the Tenants Panel were asked to take part in an event where they gave a presentation on West Lothian approach to scrutiny of the Housing Revenue Account which was received with great enthusiasm

Street Environmental Site visits - Members of the Capital Programme Working Group visited a few sites with the potential to have work carried out through the Street Environmental projects in the coming months.

Housing Networks continue to meet on the third Tuesday of the month at the Tenants Resource Centre in Whitburn. Members of the Network discuss with staff areas of Housing Services and look at performance information to ensure we are accountable for our results.

Tenants who have shown an interest in joining an evening Network were invited to the first meeting which was held at the beginning of November.

Safer Neighbourhood Team

WLC Officer based in SNT

The Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNT's) continue to work in two teams across the nine multi member ward areas as an integral part of the Community Safety Unit. In all the wards, partnership working involves the local housing team, youth worker, council officer with the SNT and officers from Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service all working together to tackle antisocial behaviour. When necessary, the partners will liaise with partners from the voluntary organisations including Mental Health advisory workers and private landlords in order to reduce antisocial behaviour.

Letter drops with Police and Housing were conducted in response to an increase in ASB in East Main Street Whitburn. Visits to illegal encampments took place in Whitburn and the travellers have since moved on.

A case in Whitburn was closed in relation to loud music, shouting, banging and excessive noise following the noise being witnessed, and warnings served. The perpetrator was in a temporary tenancy, and was receiving support from various agencies due to poor gatekeeping skills. Joint visits were completed with Housing, and meetings held with support agencies. After a final warning was served, an agreement was made that the perpetrator would move to more suitable accommodation with onsite staff.

An Interim ASBO was granted in March 2017 in respect of a tenant in Whitburn. Multiple breaches of this took place resulting in several custodial sentences. Due to this, the SNT were unable to progress with action for a full ASBO. However, the tenancy has now terminated following appropriate processes in accordance with housing management legislation.

There were 341 incidents relating to noise complaints across all of West Lothian were reported, this was a reduction from the previous reporting period, 63 related to the Whitburn and Blackburn ward, an increase of 11 reports with 21 new anti-social cases opened. This was an increase of 8 cases.

There are 3 Interim ASBO's and 1 full ASBO active within the ward area.

E. CONCLUSION

To note the contents of the report.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

None

Appendices/Attachments: None

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