



West Lothian
Council

LINLITHGOW LOCAL AREA COMMITTEE

HOUSING, CONSTRUCTION and BUILDING SERVICES

REPORT BY HEAD OF HOUSING, CONSTRUCTION AND BUILDING SERVICES

A. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide the Local Area Committee with an overview of service activities within the Linlithgow ward.

B. RECOMMENDATION

The Local Area Committee is asked to note Housing, Construction and Building Service activity as detailed in the ward report

C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

I Council Values	Focusing on our customers' needs Being honest, open and accountable Providing equality of opportunities Developing employees Making best use of our resources Working in partnership
II Policy and Legal (including Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment)	N/A
III Implications for Scheme of Delegations to Officers	N/A
IV Impact on performance and performance Indicators	N/A
V Relevance to Single Outcome Agreement	N/A
VI Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property)	N/A
VII Consideration at PDSP	N/A
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, Construction and Building Services specific to the Linlithgow ward.

Property Void & Let Performance: Mainstream Tenancies

Void Period	Jan 2013	%	Feb 2013	%	Mar 2013	%	WL Target %
0-2 weeks	0	0%	1	50%	3	75%	65%
2-4 weeks	2	67%	1	50%	1	25%	25%
4+ weeks	1	33%	0	0%	0	0%	10%
Total Lets	3	100%	2	100%	4	100%	100%

Property Void & Let Performance: Temporary Tenancies

Void Period	Jan 2013	%	Feb 2013	%	Mar 2013	%	WL Target %
0-2 weeks	0	0%	0	0%	1	50%	70%
2-4 weeks	0	0%	0	0%	1	50%	20%
4+ weeks	0	0%	0	%	0	0%	10%
Total Lets	0	0%	0	0%	2	100%	100%

Delays in re-letting can occur and 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 supported through the viewing and sign up process. 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 36 mainstream tenancies and 9 temporary tenancies let by the Linlithgow team.

There are 2 Policy Voids in the ward.

Arrears Performance

<i>2011/2012</i>	Total £Value	<i>2012/2013</i>	Total £Value
April 11	42,180	April 12	35,871
May 11	42,481	May 12	40,687
June 11	46,896	June 12	40,981
July 11	48,033	July 12	50,620
August 11	48,200	August 12	56,032
September 11	49,293	September 12	57,178
October 11	50,073	October 12	58,510
November 11	49,702	November 12	67,690
December 11	38,320	December 12	57,740
January 12	46,310	January 2013	60,676
February 12	41,393	February 2013	69,609
March 12	30,502	March 2013	46,913

Rent arrears continue to be a concern county wide and tenant engagement in respect of arrears is an ongoing challenge for the housing teams.

The Housing Manager undertakes monthly audits, cases are progressed timeously and the team strive to keep cases moving through the recovery process. An in depth analysis of the outstanding arrear cases is ongoing. The team can then target specific households with and work with families to determine a plan of action to address the situation.

Additionally the introduction of the new arrears process has meant further delay in our ability to refer cases to court; the result of this is tenants have a much higher balance before legal action can be instigated.

A number of cases are being represented by the Court Advice Project Team at the Advice Shop and agreements are being requested just prior to or on date of court appearances. Cases are being continued by the Sheriff to allow monitoring of these agreements however these usually have very high balances by this stage.

Our officers work closely with the local revenues team to ensure claims are processed as quickly as possible including housing staff collecting outstanding evidence. The team also work with Debt Support Team and the Advice Shop and are committed to support tenants who find themselves in financial difficulties, ensuring they are provided with all necessary advice and assistance.

Due to intensive intervention work and the support provided by our officers only 1 eviction was carried out during this reporting period.

Linlithgow Area Team Activity

Officers in the team have a number of tenancies under supervision for issues such as child 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 as well as ensuring, that where the situation arises, other members of the community affected are also supported.

The team are prioritising workloads with our main focus being on under occupancy visits and rent arrears.

Service Wide Welfare Reform Activity

The Housing Benefit size criteria changes took effect from 1st April 2013. The table below shows the number of West Lothian Council tenants affected. Monitoring arrangements are now in place to track the impact of the under-occupation changes on rent arrears. Housing staff will make early contact with affected tenants who get into rent arrears, to ensure appropriate advice is given and relevant referrals for support are made.

Percentage reduction of eligible rent	Number	Average weekly loss of HB (£)
14%	1973	£9.42
25%	491	£17.26
Grand Total	2464	£10.98

Office activity

Officers have worked hard in attempts to make contact and carry out as many face to face interviews as possible, some of which were very emotional and difficult.

73 out of 109 face to face advice interviews took place for tenants in the ward who will be affected by the Housing Benefit size criteria.

As a result we have identified 11 tenants wishing to move as a due to the size criteria. We will

continue to work with these tenants in offering advice and assistance for example in identifying mutual exchanges, referrals for money and debt advice and where appropriate application for discretionary Housing Benefit payments.

Issues for the forthcoming months will be liaising with tenants who are finding difficulty in making payments and also encouraging engagement with tenants not making payments. It is acknowledge that this will be a difficult and sensitive task.

Ward Specific Capital & Environmental Programme

Outcomes from 2012/13

- The multi year upgrading programme in the Bridgend area is proceeding with programme and taking the work in Auldhill Entry to a completion.
- Works to the balconies and windows in High Street have been completed.
- Central Heating has been upgraded, due to condition, health and safety rules on vents or parts availability in properties across the ward.
- Any Health and Safety related programmes in the Linlithgow Ward planned for 2012/13 have been completed, with the exception of properties where access could not be gained. Any required Handrails have been fitted where there are more than 2 steps and External Lights have been fitted to properties where they have been assessed as required. Upgrading of the fire protection systems to Hard Wired systems will have been carried out in void properties as will opportunistic periodic Inspections.
- External Painting Upgrades have been carried out in a number of properties in Linlithgow and Bridgend.
- Fencing Upgrades have been carried out in Auldhill Cottages, Auldhill Drive, Auldhill Place, Auldhill Terrace, Canal Terrace, The Vennel, Wateryett and Church Court.
- Rhone Cleaning and repair work was carried out in Auldhill Avenue, Auldhill Crescent, Auldhill Road, Manse View, New Well Wynd, Pardovan Crescent, St. John's Avenue, St. Ninian's Road and the Cross.
- Small Environmental Works have been done to the common area at St. Ninian's Road.

Planned for 2013/14

- New External Lights are planned for a number of properties in Bridgend and Linlithgow and Linlithgow Bridge
- Fencing Upgrades are planned to Auldhill Avenue, Auldhill Crescent, Auldhill Road, New Well Wynd, St. Ninian's Road, St. Ninian's Way, The Cross, St. John's Avenue, Manse View Philipstoun and Pardovan Crescent Philipstoun.
- Upgrading of the fire protection systems to hard wired systems will be carried out in The Vennel.
- Opportunistic Periodic Inspections of the electrical system will be carried out in void properties
- Rhone Cleaning and Repair will be carried out in Auldhill Avenue, Auldhill Crescent, Auldhill Road, New Well Wynd, St. Ninian's Road, St. Ninian's Way, The Cross, St. John's Avenue, Manse View Philipstoun, and Pardovan Crescent Philipstoun.

Tenant Participation Ward Information

There is one active group in the ward; Braehead Residents Group, who meet in Linlithgow Academy. The Community Based Housing Officer for this area attends their meetings along with the Community Police Officer to update group members of activities in the area and to take forward any issues raised at the meeting. The group have been well supported by resident attendance and the Area Housing Office are working to assist by sending letters to the wider community to raise awareness of the benefits of participation.

Safer Neighbourhood Council Officer Ward Information

The Safer Neighbourhood Teams across the nine Multi-Member Wards are an integral part of the Community Safety Unit and are a key feature of partnership working. In the Linlithgow ward partnership working sees the local housing team, youth worker, council officer within the SNT and Police officers all working together to tackle anti social behaviour.

WLC Officer based in SNT –

The SNT Council Officer conducted 13 joint visits with Police colleagues and the Community Based Housing Officer, resulting in 6 verbal warnings which were due to neighbour disputes and noise issues.

The 'Floorwalk' initiative was carried out in Linlithgow and Bridgend, and deemed a success by all concerned.

Three referrals were passed to victim support and 2 referrals to the Council's Environmental Wardens.

Youth Worker based in SNT

The youth worker continues to be proactive in engaging with the young people of this ward which has proven to be positive in identifying concerns that some young people may have and the affects these concerns may have on them.

E. CONCLUSION

To note the contents of the report.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

None

Appendices/Attachments: None

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