



ARMADALE AND BLACKRIDGE 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 Armadale and Blackridge ward.

B. RECOMMENDATION

The Local Area Committee is asked to note Housing, Customer and Building Services activity as detailed in the ward report for the period 1st October – 31st December 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. 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 Armadale and Blackridge ward.

Property Void & Let Performance: Mainstream Tenancies

Void Period	Oct 2018	%	Nov 2018	%	Dec 2018	%	WL Target %
0-2 weeks	19	79.17%	13	68.42%	9	56.25%	55%
2-4 weeks	1	4.2%	0	0%	0	0%	30%
4+ weeks	4	16.7%	6	31.6%	7	43.8%	15%
Total Lets	24	100%	19	100%	16	100%	100%

Property Void & Let Performance: Temporary Tenancies

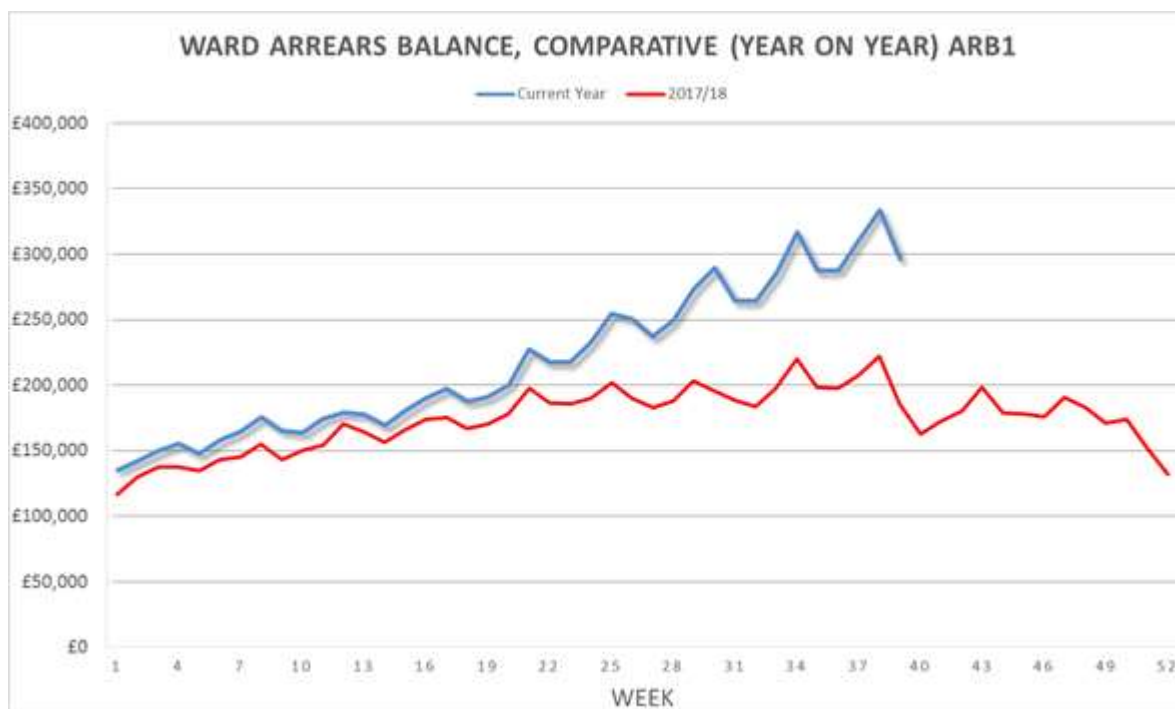
Void Period	Oct 2018	%	Nov 2018	%	Dec 2018	%	WL Target %
0-2 weeks	3	75%	2	33.3%	0	0%	55%
2-4 weeks	1	25%	3	50%	1	33.3%	30%
4+ weeks	0	0%	1	16.7%	2	66.7%	15%
Total Lets	4	100%	6	100%	3	100%	100%

Delays in re-letting can occur for a variety of reasons i.e. 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.

There is 36 policy voids in the ward - 4 awaiting demolition, 4 due to legal purposes, 1 being held for decant, and 27 due to undergoing major works i.e. electrical, wood rot, structural, asbestos removal and H&S issues.

Rent Arrears

For this ward the cumulative rental charge this year (debit) for the housing stock is £4,588,376 and £4,364,268 has been collected giving a strong collection rate of 127.0%



Arrears Banding	2017/18 (WK39)		2018/19 (WK39)	
	Balance	Tenants In Arrears	Balance	Tenants In Arrears
£0.01 to £99.99	£8,554	184	£8,090	232
£100.00 to £299.99	£37,801	205	£41,815	227
£300.00 to £499.99	£33,606	89	£40,925	103
£500.00 to £749.99	£30,619	50	£39,390	64
£750.00 to £999.99	£20,885	24	£44,371	51
£1000.00 to £1999.99	£40,046	30	£91,695	67
£2000+	£14,278	6	£30,092	11
Total	£185,788	588	£296,378	755

The ward arrears position for Q3 is £296,378. This is an increase of £110,590 on last year's position. The West Lothian overall position has increased by £879,735 from last year and on 01 October was £2,698,513.

While there are 78 serious arrears cases (£1,000+) it should be noted 61% 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

Local 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 are 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 support, advice and assistance. Such assistance includes referrals for money, energy 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.

Capital Programme and New Build Council Housing

Capital Programme Update

Street	Works	Progress 2018/19	
Bathville flats	Major Refurbishment	5%	Phases 1 & 2 were completed within 2017/18. The issue with title deeds delaying phases 4 and 5 is being addressed currently with phase 4 titles completed and phase 5 title amendments ongoing. A Bat survey is causing additional delays.
Bedlormie Drive, Ogilface Crescent	Roof and roughcast	0%	Awaiting the building warrant.
53 – 107 Lower Bathville	Roof and render repairs, chimney removal and all external repairs	30%	On site. No ongoing issues. Environmental works to follow on completion of Upgrade works.
Park Road flats	Repairs to path surface	100%	Works were completed by ISS. Some local vandalism caused damage that has been rectified. Additional resurfacing works will be carried out by the environmental contractor ISS due to additional defects.
Park Road flats	Repairs to security gate magnetic locks and common entry door systems	85%	Repair works to the common gates and common doors are being carried out by Building Services.
Strathlogie	PV Panels	99%	The 2018/19 works are progressing well on site, following the roof renewal works.

Other information	Planned programmes, central heating, aids & adaptations and testing (legionella, electrical condition etc.)	All progressing well.	Planned maintenance at 34 Strathavon Terrace, Westfield - render only – job now completed. Farquhar Square, Blackridge – roofs only – completed 30/09/2018 with only snagging works ongoing.
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New Build Programme

Site	No of units	Site Start	No. of houses handed over	Site Completion
Mayfield, Armadale	22	Aug 2016	20	November 2018
Bathville Cross	3	Apr 2016	3	October 2018
Bathville Cross	12*	Apr 2016	0	2019/20 (estimated)

*Number of new build units reduced at Bathville will be replaced with buy backs in Armadale

*The Nelson Park site for 26 units will not proceed. This will be replaced with buy backs in the Armadale and Blackridge ward.

Tenant Participation

Homeless Tenant Led Inspection – A team of Inspectors have carried out an inspection into the Housing Need Service. The inspectors are expected to report back their findings early in 2019 to the Head of HC&BS, Senior Managers and officers working within the Housing Need Service. An action plan will be developed following the feedback session

TIS Award for Best Innovative Practise – The TP Team were successful in the Council's Celebrating Success Awards, receiving the 'New and Innovative Services for our Communities' award for the team's work on Digital Involvement with tenants through the use of text messaging and the services Facebook Group, specifically for council tenants.

Evening Housing Network

The first evening network meeting was held in the Civic Centre on the 7th November 2018. Thirteen (13) new tenants attended and advised they would be interested in attending other sessions in 2019. The session included an overview of Tenant Participation, to show those attending the ways they can get involved in improving and shaping service delivery.

Tenants Repairs Policy Scrutiny Session

A working group was formed from members of the West Lothian Tenants Housing Network to review the repairs policy with officers from Building Services. Two sessions were held, one on 23rd October 2018 and the other on the 7th November 2018 at the Whitburn Tenants Resource Centre.

Good Neighbour Award Ceremony

The annual award ceremony was held on Friday 26th October 2018 in the Civic Centre. The awards are held to celebrate those neighbours nominated for being a kind and considerate neighbour. Both tenants and residents can be nominated and we promote this award in the e summer edition of Tenants News.

Focus Groups

Four meetings were held on the 21st and 22nd November 2018 (am and pm sessions) in Whitburn and East Calder to discuss tenant satisfaction, following the 2017 Tenant Satisfaction Survey. Tenants attended for an informal discussion, focussing on four questions relating to decision making, quality of their home, good value for money and whether or not support was required within their tenancy. Officers are currently reviewing the comments/feedback received.

Tenants Training

A session was held on the 5th December 2018 with tenant representatives from the West Lothian area, to help increase awareness on the Housing Allocation Policy, with practical insights and information provided on how applications are processed and assessed.

Safer Neighbourhood Team

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, 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 voluntary organisations including mental health advisory workers and private landlords in order to reduce antisocial behaviour. The Safer Neighbourhood team of 9 officers now work in two zones, the East and the West zones. All the officers now deal with noise nuisance calls as part of their working remit.

Multiple calls were received regarding a disturbance at a party which had got out of hand. Police attended and had cause to target the occupier with a Taser. Joint visits were carried out – appears parents were away and son caused multiple issues during their absence. Tenants of property warned. There have been no further incidents.

A case in Armadale involving damage to property, verbal abuse and threatening behaviour was closed. A joint visit was arranged. The complainant was apprehensive about speaking to Police, but did give details to SNT. There had been numerous incidents over a number of weeks. A letter drop was completed, and further witnesses found. A warning was served on the perpetrator. Since the joint visit and warning, there have been no further incidents.

There are 3 full ASBOs in the area.

E. CONCLUSION

To note the contents of the report.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

None.

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